

GOP Impeach Vote 'Might Be Suicidal'

Washington

The second-ranking Republican on the House Judiciary Committee said yesterday that it might be "suicidal" for members of President Nixon's party to vote on a recommendation that the President be impeached.

But, Representative Robert McClory of Illinois declared, he would ignore the perils to his own political future if he decided that Mr. Nixon should be held accountable for "wrongdoing taking place right under the president's nose."

McClory's remarks, in an extraordinary conversation with reporters, illustrated the growing pressures being placed by Republican members of the committee as they approach the panel's day of reckoning with impeachment.

The proximity of that conclusive vote has apparently led to intense political pressure on these Republican members of the committee who, like McClory, contend that they are undecided whether impeachment would be warranted by the evidence.

One Republican, who asked not to be identified, said that colleagues on the committee who had decided to oppose impeachment were trying to put pressure on the undecided members to join in a solid Republican bloc.

Other Republicans, such as representative Tom Railsback of Illinois, have reported that the anti-impeachment mail they receive has become more voluminous than pro-impeachment mail.

An upstate New York Republican, who is not a member of the Judiciary Committee but whose experience typifies what those on the panel are undergoing, reported that two long-time campaign contributors — a Republican who opposes impeachment and a Democrat who favors it — had warned

separately that their future financial backing would be contingent on the congressman's impeachment vote.

Caldwell Butler (Rep.-Va.) said yesterday that he had not been subjected to undue pressure from constituents, but Butler's wife, June, has sought to influence his vote — reportedly in favor of impeachment — by reading to the congressman at bedtime from "All the President's Men," the book in which two Washington Post reporters described their efforts to plumb the Watergate depths.

The significance of the half-dozen or so undecided committee Republicans is that Democrats, virtually all of whom are expected to recommend impeachment, have said that bipartisan support would be essential if the committee finding is to be persuasive on the House floor.

In a statement that some inquiry officials interpreted as a form of subtle pressure on the undecideds, Representative Charles E. Wiggins of California said Tuesday that he expects all 16 of his Republican committee colleagues to join him in voting against impeachment.

But Railsback said that he and "at least" three others — William S. Cohen of Maine, Butler and Hamilton Fish Jr. — would remain undecided until they had heard White House and committee lawyers argue the merits of the case. Cohen stated that Wiggins was not speaking

for him. Representative Henry P. Smith III of New York insisted he was "persuadable" either way.

And McClory, whose public statements have alternated from defense to criticism of Mr. Nixon, agonized aloud during a recess in yesterday's hearing about the burden of the forthcoming committee decision.

"It would be a very difficult decision for me" to vote for impeachment, he said, adding, "but I'm not going to rule it out because of the difficulty or because of the suicidal aspects involved."

He said that he was troubled by two aspects of the Watergate affair. The first, McClory noted, was the president's resistance of judiciary committee subpoenas for White House tape recordings and other evidence.

"I don't see how we can excuse that kind of concealment of vital evidence," he said.

Moreover, he added, he is concerned that "so many of those who were in the White House are now in jail or have completed their terms or are awaiting sentencing."

"There was obviously wrongdoing taking place right under the president's nose and I'm very concerned," said McClory. "Is there any way to run a White House?"

Asked whether those two matters would merit impeachment, he replied ruefully, "That's something I'm going to have to decide."